



## The Mental Health Problems in University Students of Lahore, Pakistan

Ibadur Rehman, Iqra Shabbir, Zakaullah

\*<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: MO, BHU Punjkossi tehsil, Bahawalnagar, 00923339770311, ibad.rehman\_311@yahoo.com<sup>2</sup> Medical Officer, BHU 289-HR, Fortabbas, 00923339770311, lyzeofkiel9770311@gmail.com Medical Officer, RHC Rehanwala tehsil, Nankana Sahab, 00923127936697, zakaullahkemcolian@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The students face various challenges throughout their educational career. In university years, stress of competition increases deliberately resulting in a number of psychological problems among students.

**Aim:** The present study aims to assess mental health problems of university students of Lahore, Pakistan.

**Methodology:** The students of various universities were distributed with student problem checklist. In total, 1662 students participated in the study with age range of 19 to 26 years. The checklist consisted of 45 items related to mental health problems including sense of being dysfunctional, loss of confidence, lack of self regulation and anxiety proneness.

**Results:** The results showed that 12 % students were suffering from very severe psychological issues, whereas, 24 % students were dealing with severe psychological problems.

**Conclusion:** It is highly recommended that the authorities form counseling services with trained and professional personnel for betterment of students

**Keywords:** students, mental health, mental problems

### INTRODUCTION

The university years are considered as most demanding in educational period of an individual. The student may face various challenges, which result in different emotional, social and physical problems (Rodgers & Tennison, 2009). The emotional and social pressures witnessed by students make them prone to mental health issues (Eisenberg, Gollust, Golberstein, & Hefner, 2007).

Previous research works have indicated that university students, throughout the world, suffer from mental health problems (Nordin, Talib, & Yaacob, 2009; Seim & Spates, 2010; Verger, Guagliardo, Gilbert, Rouillon, & Kovess-Masfety, 2009). On the other hand, it has been indicated that these problems are enhancing day by day, both in terms of number and severity (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010).

Mental health can be elaborated in various ways to understand concept and factors related to mental

health problems and ways of coping with them. The commonly reported problems experienced by university students include interpersonal issues, destructive attitudes, mood instability and self-concept mutilation. Other important issues include depression, anger, stress, and eating disorders, which influence their academic performance and mental state (Tosevski, Milovancevic, & Gajic, 2010).

In the last few years, the counseling needs of university students have strictly been psychological problems. Almost one third of university students are suffering from psychological issues at present. According to Drum et al (2009), male university students are highly prone to suicidal ideations. On the other hand, female university students tend to develop anxiety and depression (Eisenberg, et al 2007). Zivin et al (2009) claimed that students sustain mental issues they face in university life. Nordin et al (2009) found that a positive relation exists between loneliness and mental health problems for students of Malaysia. Stallman and Shochet (2009) assessed mental health issues among female university students of Australia. It was found that 45.1% students suffered from serious psychological issue, whereas, 24.4% had mild psychological problems. Stallman (2010) found a prevalence of 19.2% for mental health problems among university students. Hamdan-Mansour et al (2009) indicated that 75% university students suffer from depressive symptoms. Shiels et al (2008) have reported a prevalence of 47% for anxiety and 10% for depression among students. Bayram and Bilgel (2008) evaluated stress, depression and anxiety among students of Turkey. It was found that 27.1% individuals had depression, 41.1% had anxiety and 27% had stress. The female students were found to be more prone towards anxiety and stress. Guney et al (2010) found that life satisfaction decreases prevalence of anxiety and depression among university students.

The dilemma of situation is that majority of students do not seek for any therapeutic treatment (Zivin et al 2009). Mental health problems may result in poor academic performance of students



(Breslau et al 2008). Previous studies have reported that mental health problems increase use of alcohol and nicotine. Moreover, self-esteem of students get influenced. This increases need of developing counseling services for university students (Harrar, et al 2010; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010).

The mental health problems in university students of Pakistan have not been well-explored. Mahmood and Saleem (2011) reported that university students suffer from anxiety, lack of self-regulation, lack of confidence and sense of dysfunctional. Harrar et al (2010) indicated a tremendous increase in mental health problems of university students. However, most of the previous research works have focused on mental health disorders instead of problems. By considering the changing pressures on students, it is inconvenient to label them as mental disorders. Due to variation in assessment tools, cut-off points and operational definition of mental health problems, the prevalence reported in previous research works varies. By keeping in view the severity of problem and limitations in previous research works, it is mandatory to evaluate magnitude of mental health problems prevalent among university students of Pakistan. Thus, the present research work aims to assess burden of mental health problems of university students of Lahore, Pakistan. This study would be helpful in developing student counseling services for students.

## METHODOLOGY

### Study population

The sample population of present study was 2000 university students with age range of 19 to 26 years. Random sampling technique was used to select participants from four government universities of Lahore, Pakistan.

### Instrument

The students were interrogated about four demographic characteristics including age, gender, family system and parental education. These factors were found to be associated with mental health problems of university students, through review of previous research works.

The assessment of mental health problems of university students was performed through Student Problem Checklist adopted from Mahmood and Saleem (2011). Four types of mental health problems were assessed including anxiety proneness, lack of self regulation, loss of confidence and sense of being dysfunctional.

### Data collection

The pre-designed questionnaires were distributed among students of four selected universities. The students were explained with the purpose of study. Informed consents were collected from all the participants. Out of 2000 distributed questionnaires, 1662 were considered on the basis of correct completion of forms. The students were confirmed with confidentiality of their personal information. The students were asked to rate each item of SPCL, to indicate it with extent to which it bothers them.

## RESULTS

The Table 1 depicts education of respondent's parents. The average education for fathers was intermediate, whereas, metric was the average education for participant's mothers. The age of participants was found to be  $23.18 \pm 1.11$ .

**Table 1:** Age and years of education of parents

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Fathers education	11.13	2.15
Mothers education	9.28	1.22
Age	23.18	1.11

The Table 2 shows frequency of participants according to four categories of SPCL. If 'very sever' category is considered as cut off point for presence of serious mental health problem, about 12 % of respondents require clinical attention. The loss of self regulation was found to be the most frequent mental problem among university students with frequency of 14 %. This was followed by the problems of anxiety proneness (13 %), dysfunctional sense and loss of confidence (12 %).

**Table 2** Frequency of participants according to four categories of SPCL

Factors	Moderate %	Severe %	Very severe %
Dysfunctional sense	51	22	12
Loss of confidence	56	23	12
Loss of self regulation	55	22	14
Anxiety proneness	54	25	13
Total	53	24	13



The Table 3 shows means, standard deviations and p test values for four factors on the basis of genders. The significant difference was found for aspects of dysfunctional sense, loss of self regulation, anxiety proneness. However, in case of loss of confidence no significant difference was found. Overall, females scored higher as compared to males.

**Table 3:** Means, standard deviations and p test on basis of genders for four factors

Factors	Gender	Mean	Standard deviation	p test
Dysfunctional sense	Male	12.42	3.54	<b>0.001 *</b>
	Female	15.24	5.35	
Loss of confidence	Male	11.23	5.76	<b>0.254</b>
	Female	15.24	6.36	
Loss of self regulation	Male	12.22	6.26	<b>0.001 *</b>
	Female	14.11	5.87	
Anxiety proneness	Male	15.24	7.36	<b>0.001 *</b>
	Female	17.45	7.25	
<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>48.37</b>	<b>19.24</b>	<b>0.001 *</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>57.24</b>	<b>21.23</b>	

\* p<0.05

## DISCUSSION

The previous research works have indicated that students are more prone towards mental health problems as compared to general population (Eisenberg et al., 2007). Many factors play important role in developing stress for the students. On one end lies the academic pressure, whereas, on other end are factors such as change towards adulthood, needs of practical life, demands of relationships (Rodgers & Tennison, 2009). Apart from these factors, there are many other environmental factors impacting on psychological wellbeing of a student (Benton et al., 2003). Research has shown that problems faced by students in early years of life have long lasting effect on their psychological and emotional aspects (Zivin et al., 2009). Other problems are overcome by students through passage of time. In order to assess these kinds of problems, nomothetic approach has previously been applied (Cooley et al., 2007). The appearance of intensity of symptoms more than average level is linked with the severity of symptoms. Anyhow, the emergence of symptoms cannot be considered as having a disorder (Tosevski et al., 2010). Thus, the present study does not deal with the prevalence of mental health problems but highlights the effects of stress laid on students. The diagnostics for a disorder focus on aspects such as presence or absence of symptoms. The decision regarding diagnosis cannot be made on the basis of self report of any person. It takes into account factors such as contribution of various factors, history of issue and appearance of symptoms. Great variation can be noticed in previous studies based on prevalence (Stallman & Shochet, 2009). In students, mental health problems range from 4 % to 85 % (Hamdan-Mansour et al., 2009). However, this variation may not be only result of diagnostic approach, instead

many other factors may also play role. This includes location, time duration, instrument and problem of a particular study (Gallagher et al., 2001). Despite the variation in prevalence estimated for university students, it is believed that psychological problems witnessed by students need attention with early recognition and well-timed anticipation (Drum et al., 2009).

In the present study, students rated themselves against a Student Problems Checklist. Prevalence was estimated by assessment through severe, very severe and moderate categories. Instead of diagnostic tools, symptoms were considered in this study. The category of being dysfunctional is extremely important as it is the first symptom that appears when a person faces stress. About 12 % of the population had indicated this symptom. For loss of control, lack of self regulation and anxiety proneness symptoms, prevalence was found to be 12 %, 14 % and 13 %. The total prevalence for very severe category was 13 %. On the other hand, severe category had figure of 24 %. On the basis of gender prevalence, females were found to be suffering more from psychological issues as compared to male students. This scenario represents a critical picture of presence of psychological issues among university students. Moreover, urgent response on part of authorities is required in order to cope up with the situation. It is also important that universities form counseling services for students so that the students be mitigated through timely efforts.

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that university students face a variety of stressful conditions, which can lead towards psychological issues. Timely action is not taken to counsel the students so that they could pass out their years of education easily.



## REFERENCES

- Adewuya, A. O. (2006). Prevalence of major depressive disorder in Nigerian college students with alcohol-related problems. *General Hospital Psychiatry*, 28, 169-173.
- Andrews, B., & Wilding, J. M. (2004). The relation of depression and anxiety to life-stress and achievement in students. *British Journal of Psychology*, 95, 509-521.
- Bayram, N., & Bilgel, N. (2008). The prevalence and socio-demographic correlations of depression, anxiety and stress among a group of university students. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 43, 667-672. . (n.d.).
- Benton, S. A., Robertson, J. M., Tseng, W., Newton, F. B., & Benton, S. L. (2003). Changes in counseling center client problems across 13 years. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 34, 66-72.
- Breslau, J., Lane, M., Sampson, N., & Kessler, R. C. (2008). Mental disorders and subsequent educational attainment in a US national sample. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 42, 708-716. . (n.d.).
- Cooley, E., Toray, T., Valdez, N., & Tee, M. (2007). Risk factors for maladaptive eating patterns in college women. *Eating and Weight Disorders*, 12 (3), 132-139. . (n.d.).
- Cranford, J. A., Eisenberg, D., & Serran, A. M. (2009). Substance use behaviors, mental health problems, and use of mental health services in a probability sample of college students. *Addictive Behaviors*, 34, 134-145.
- Drum, D.J., Brownson, C., Denmark, A.B., & Smith, M.E. (2009). New data on the nature of suicidal crises in college students: Shifting the paradigm. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practices*, 40,213-22. . (n.d.).
- Eisenberg, D., Gollust, S.E., Golberstein, E., & Hefner, J.L. (2007). Prevalence and correlates of depression, anxiety, and suicidality among university students. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 77, 534-542. . (n.d.).
- Gallagher, R., Gill, A., & Sysko, H. (2000). National survey of counseling center directors. Alexandria, VA: International Association of Counseling Services. . (n.d.).
- Gallagher, R., Sysko, H., & Zhang, B. (2001). *National survey of counseling center directors*. . International Association of Counseling Services, Alexandria, VA.
- Guney, S. Khalafat, T., & Boysan, M. (2010). Dimensions of mental health: Life satisfaction, anxiety and depression: A preventive mental health study in Ankara University students population. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2, 1210-1213. . (n.d.).
- Hamdan-Mansour , A.M., Halabi , J. O., & Dawani , H.A. (2009). Depression, hostility, and substance use among university students in Jordan. *Mental Health and Substance Use Dual Diagnosis*, 2(1), 52-63. . (n.d.).
- Harrar, W. R., Affsprung, E.H., & Long, J.C. (2010). Assessing Campus Counseling Needs. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, 24, 233-240. . (n.d.).
- Hunt, J., & Eisenberg, D. (2010). Mental health problems and help-seeking behavior among college students. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 46, 3-10.
- Katherine, W. (2000). Promoting mental, emotional and social health: A whole school approach. London: Routledge Falmer. . (n.d.).
- Kessler, R. C., Barker, P. R., Colpe, L. J., Epstein, J. F., Gfroerer, J. C., & Hiripi, E. (2003). Screening for serious mental illness in the general population. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 60(2), 184-189. . (n.d.).
- Lenz, B. K. (2004). Tobacco, depression, and lifestyle choices in the pivotal early college years. *Journal of American College Health*, 52, 213-219. . (n.d.).
- Lyubomirsky, S., Kasri, F., & Zehm, K., (2003). Dysphoric rumination impairs concentration on academic tasks. *Cognitive Therapy Research*, 27,309-330. . (n.d.).



- Mahmood, Z., & Saleem, S. (2011). Assessing psychological problems in university students in Pakistan: A psychometric study. *FWU Journal of Social Sciences*, 5 (1), 134-148.
- Nordin, N. M., Talib, M. A., & Yaacob, S.N. (2009). Personality, Loneliness and Mental Health among Undergraduates at Malaysian Universities. *European Journal of Scientific Research*, 36(2), 285-298. . (n.d.).
- Ovuga, E., Boardman, J., & Wasserman, D. (2006). Undergraduate student mental health at Makerere University, Uganda. *World Psychiatry*, 5 (1), 51-52.
- Restifo, K., Akse, J., Guzman, N. V., Benjamins, C., & Dick, K. (2009). A pilot study of self-esteem as a mediator between family factors and depressive symptoms in young adult university students. *Journal of Nervous Mental Disorder*, 197(3), 166-171. . (n.d.).
- Rodgers, L.S., & Tennison, L.R. (2009). A preliminary assessment of adjustment disorder among First-Year College Students. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 23(3), 220-230. . (n.d.).
- Seim, R. W., & Spates, C. R. (2010). The prevalence and comorbidity of specific phobias in college students and their interest in receiving treatment. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, 24, 49-58.
- Shiels, C., Gabbay, M., & Exley, D. (2008). Psychological distress in students registered at a university-based general practice. *Primary Care and Community Psychiatry*, 13, 9-18.
- Sonnak, C., & Towell, T. (2001). The impostor phenomenon in British university students: Relationship between self-esteem, mental health, parental rearing style and socioeconomic status. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 31, 863-874.
- Stallman, H. M. (2010). Psychological distress in university students: A comparison with general population data. *Australian Psychologist*, 45 (4), 249-257.
- Stallman, H. M., & Shochet, I. (2009). Prevalence of mental health problems in Australian university health services. *Australian Psychologists*, 44 (2), 122-127.
- Stanley, N., & Manthorpe, J. (2001). Responding to students' mental health needs: Impermeable systems and diverse users. *Journal of Mental Health*, 10 (1), 41-52.
- Tosevski, D. L., Milovancevic, M. P., & Gajic, S. D. (2010). Personality and psychopathology of university students. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, 23 (1), 48- 52.
- Verger, P., Guagliardo, V., Gilbert, F., Rouillon, F., & Kovess-Masfety, V. (2009). Psychiatric disorders in students in six French universities: 12-month prevalence, comorbidity, impairment and help-seeking. *Social Psychiatry Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 45 (2), 189-199.
- Weitzman, E. R. (2004). Poor mental health, depression, and associations with alcohol consumption, harm, and abuse in a national sample of young adults in college. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 192, 269-277.
- Zivin, K., Eisenberg, D., Gollust, S. E., & Golberstein, E. (2009). Persistence of mental health problems and needs in a college student population. *Journal of Affective Disorders* 117, 180-185. (n.d.).